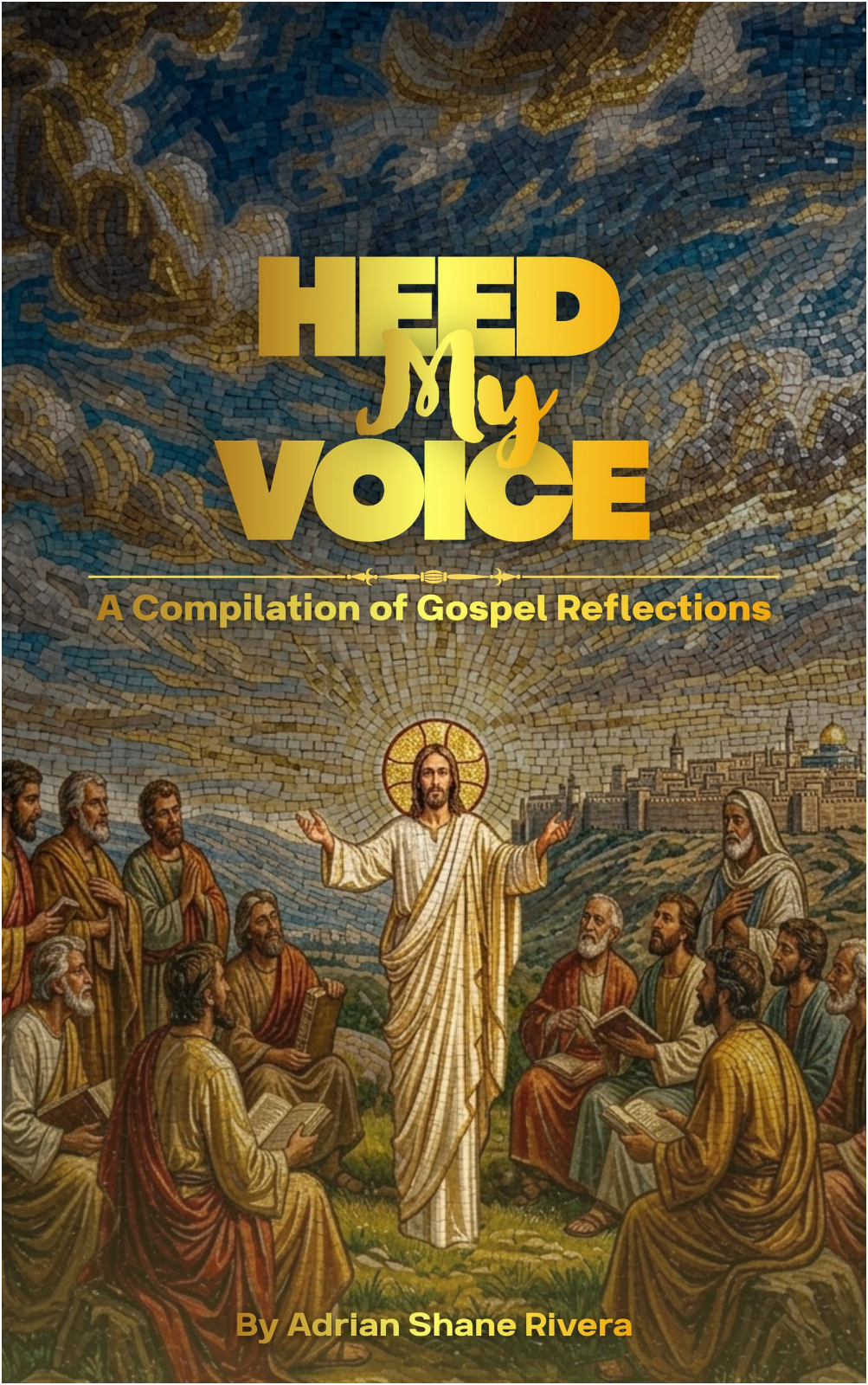
HEED
My
VOICE
A Compilation of Gospel Reflections
By Adrian Shane Rivera

Adrian Shane Rivera

HEED MY VOICE

A Compilation of Gospel Reflections

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To Jesus and to Mama Mary

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Preface

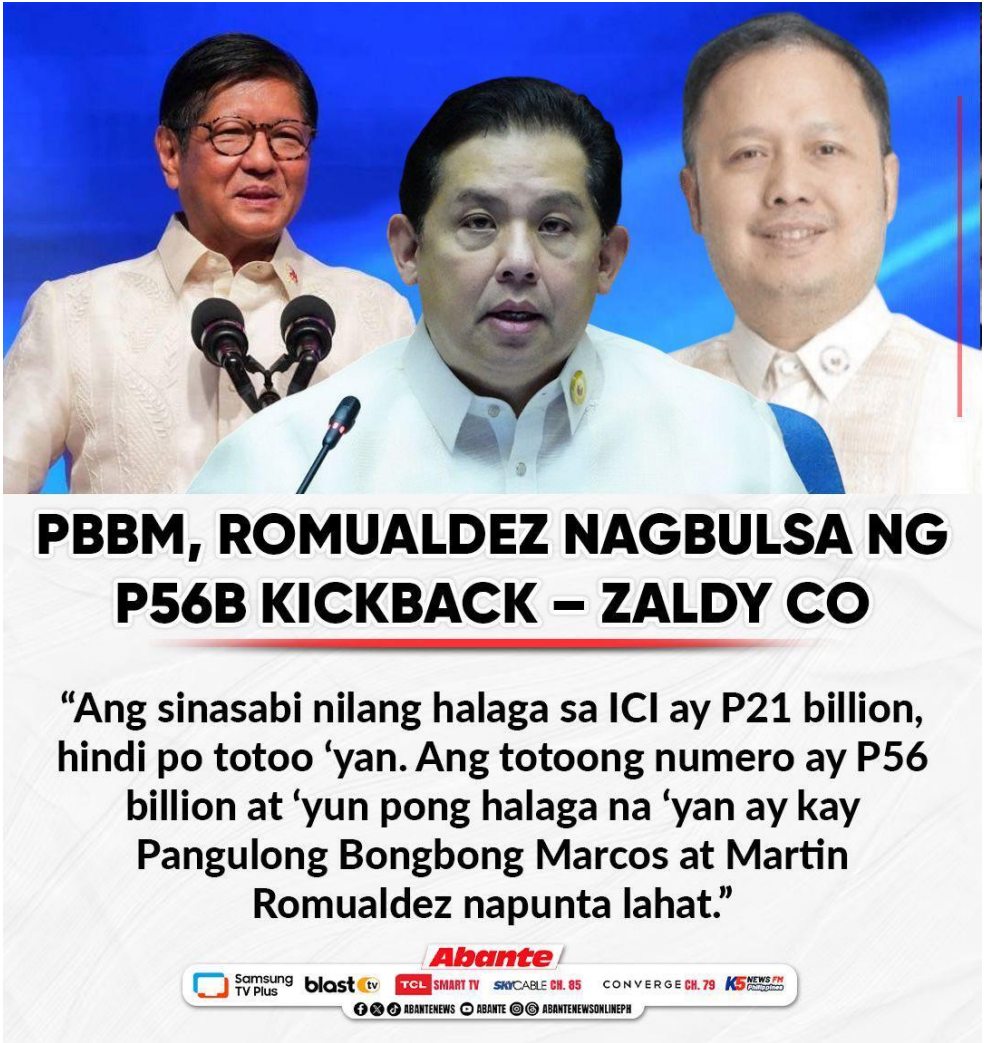
This collection, *Digital Examen*, is my humble reflection on the journey of faith and life during the years 2025–2026. The word "examen" comes from the Ignatian tradition, a prayer of looking back at the day to see where God has been present. In the same way, this digital form gathers my experiences, the news of our country, and the voice of the Gospel, so that we may discern how God continues to speak in our times.

Here, the reader will find stories of corruption and protest, of disaster and solidarity, and of vocation and hope. Each chapter connects real events with the Word of God, showing that faith is not only inside the chapel but also alive in the streets, in the struggles of the people, and in the call of service. The *Digital Examen* is both personal and communal: it is my way of sharing how the Gospel lights up the realities we face, and how every moment—whether painful or joyful—can be a chance to return to the Lord.

Chapter I: Corruption as a Moral and Spiritual Crisis

The Kickback Scandal

The ₱56 billion kickback scandal from flood control projects allegedly involving President Marcos Jr. and former Speaker Romualdez shows how corruption harms our country. These funds were supposed to protect communities from flooding, a problem that continues to affect thousands of Filipinos every year. Instead, reports claim that the money was diverted for personal gain. This scandal is not only about politics; it is a moral issue that strikes at the heart of our society. Corruption directly affects ordinary people, especially those who live in flood-prone areas and depend on government projects for their safety and survival. When resources meant for protection are stolen, lives are put at risk, trust in leadership is destroyed, and the common good is neglected.


PBBM, ROMUALDEZ NAGBULSA NG P56B KICKBACK – ZALDY CO
"Ang sinasabi nilang halaga sa ICI ay P21 billion, hindi po totoo 'yan. Ang totoong numero ay P56 billion at 'yun pong halaga na 'yan ay kay Pangulong Bongbong Marcos at Martin Romualdez napunta lahat."
Abante
Samsung TV Plus
blast tv
TCL SMART TV
SKYCABLE CH. 85
CONVERGE CH. 79
ABANTENEWS
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Source: Abante News. Rep. Zaldy Co alleges ₱56B in kickbacks involving PBBM and Speaker Romualdez regarding the ICI project.

Gospel Connection

The Gospel reading for November 9, 2025, John 2:13–22, speaks powerfully to this situation. In this passage, Jesus enters the Temple and drives out the money changers, declaring, *"Stop making my Father's house a marketplace."* His action is not only about cleansing a physical space but also about restoring its true purpose. The Temple was meant to be a house of prayer, a place where people could encounter God. By turning it into a marketplace, the money changers had corrupted its sacred mission. In the same way, public resources are entrusted to leaders for the service of the people. When those resources are misused for selfish gain, it is like profaning the Temple—turning what is meant for service into a tool for greed. This Gospel passage reminds us that sacred trust must never be abused. Leaders entrusted with funds and authority are called to act responsibly, faithfully, and with integrity. Corruption and misuse of disaster funds reveal failed

stewardship, a betrayal of the people who depend on those resources. Yet the Gospel also offers hope. Jesus does not simply condemn wrongdoing; He restores the Temple to its true purpose. This shows us that renewal is possible when integrity is upheld. Even in the face of corruption, small acts of honesty and faithfulness can bring change.

Failed Stewardship and Betrayal

For citizens, the challenge is clear. If we live with honesty and demand accountability from our leaders, transformation can happen. Change does not only depend on those in power; it also depends on ordinary people who choose integrity in their daily lives. As Christian communicators, we have a special responsibility. We are called to speak the truth with courage, expose injustice, and remind society that stewardship is sacred. Communication is not only about reporting scandals; it is about showing how the Gospel calls us to justice, transparency, and service. By connecting current events with the Word of God, we help people see that faith is not separate from social issues but deeply connected to them.

True Leadership Rooted in Integrity

In the end, the allegations of kickbacks are not only about money but about failed stewardship. John 2:13–22 warns us that abusing entrusted spaces and resources leads to condemnation. True leadership is not measured by wealth, influence, or power but by faithfulness to the common good. Leaders who misuse resources fail in their vocation, while those who serve with integrity fulfill their calling. For Christians, the response must be both personal and communal: to live honestly, to demand accountability, and to proclaim that serving God means rejecting dishonest gain.This reflection challenges us to see corruption not only as a political scandal but as a spiritual crisis. Just as Jesus cleansed the Temple, we too must work to cleanse society of greed and dishonesty. Our role as communicators is to inspire both leaders and citizens to choose integrity over corruption, service over selfishness, and faithfulness over betrayal. In doing so, we uphold the Gospel's call to justice and remind the world that true leadership is rooted in responsibility, stewardship, and love for the common good.

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Chapter II: Perseverance in Truth and Justice

The Trillion Peso March

On November 30, 2025, I joined my fellow seminarians from St. Paul Seminary in attending the Trillion Peso March, a protest that became both a civic and spiritual witness. For us, it was not simply a political demonstration but a moral stand against corruption and the misuse of public funds. Allegations of massive irregularities in infrastructure and flood control projects had stirred outrage, and the people's response was clear: they demanded accountability. The National Capital Region Police Office declared a full alert, deploying thousands of personnel to secure the rallies, underscoring the scale of the event and the tension surrounding it. Yet, despite the heavy security presence, the march was envisioned as peaceful and faith-driven, with 86 dioceses and archdioceses confirming their participation. As a seminarian, I felt the weight of this moment deeply, and I turned to the Gospel proclaimed just two days earlier, on November 26, 2025: Luke 21:12-19. In this passage, Jesus warns His disciples of persecution and betrayal but assures them: *"By your perseverance you will secure your lives."* He also tells them not to be afraid to speak the truth, for the Holy Spirit will give them wisdom and guidance. This Gospel became the lens through which I understood our presence at the march.

Source: Inquirer News. 86 Catholic dioceses across the Philippines unite to support the November 30 "Trillion Peso March 2.0" against government corruption.

Gospel Connection

Reflecting on Luke 21:12-19, I realized how directly it spoke to the reality of the Trillion Peso March. Jesus tells His followers that they will face trials, betrayal, and hatred, yet He promises that perseverance will secure their lives. He also assures them that they need not fear speaking the truth, because the Holy Spirit will provide the words and wisdom that no adversary can refute. I saw this truth embodied in the marchers who, despite threats of intimidation and political backlash, chose to stand for justice. As seminarians, we joined them not only as citizens but as witnesses of faith, showing that the Church's voice must be heard in the public square. Our presence was a reminder that discipleship is not confined to the chapel or classroom; it must be lived out in solidarity with the people.

The Gospel gave me hope. Jesus' assurance that perseverance leads to life reminded me that our struggle was not in vain. The collective cry for transparency and accountability was part of securing a future rooted in integrity. At the same time, the Gospel offered a critique: corruption and dynastic politics are forms of betrayal, echoing Jesus' warning that betrayal often comes from those closest to power. For me, the misuse of public funds was not just a political failure but a moral one, a betrayal of the people's trust and dignity.

Civic Protest as Spiritual Witness

This realization challenged me personally. As a seminarian, I knew I could not remain silent or passive in the face of such injustice. Perseverance meant more than enduring; it meant actively resisting corruption, advocating for truth, and being willing to endure discomfort for the sake of righteousness. The march revealed the "signs of the times": a society weary of corruption yet still

willing to rise in peaceful protest, and a Church reclaiming its prophetic voice by standing with the marginalized. For me, the call was clear: to speak truth with courage, trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide my words, and to encourage others to see protests not as chaos but as collective cries for righteousness.

Faith and Civic Courage Hand in Hand

In the end, when I read the Trillion Peso March through Luke 21:12-19, I saw more than a political event; I saw a spiritual witness. It reminded me that faith and civic courage must walk hand in hand, and that by enduring trials with steadfastness, we can secure not only our lives but also the moral future of our nation. The Gospel taught me that perseverance is the path to life, and I saw that truth embodied in the marchers—and in our seminary's decision to stand with them. Jesus' words gave me courage: do not be afraid to speak the truth, for the Holy Spirit will provide wisdom and guidance. For me, the task as a Christian communicator is clear: to proclaim hope, critique betrayal, and challenge the faithful to endure in truth. The Trillion Peso March stands as a testament to the enduring power of perseverance, and it calls me, as a seminarian of St. Paul Seminary, to live out the Gospel's promise that steadfastness and Spirit-guided truth lead to life.

Chapter III: Compassion and Solidarity in Times of Disaster

The Tawi-Tawi Fire

Last week, a very heartbreaking news came from Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, where a massive fire destroyed more than one thousand houses and displaced thousands of families. The fire spread quickly because of strong winds and the light materials used in the houses, such as wood, bamboo, and nipa. In just a short time, entire neighborhoods were reduced to ashes, leaving families with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Children, mothers, fathers, and elderly people suddenly became homeless, and many of them cried as they watched their homes and belongings disappear in the flames. This tragedy reminds us of the fragility of life and the importance of community support, especially in times of disaster. According to Philippine Daily Inquirer (2026), the fire was one of the worst in the province's history, leaving thousands of residents in evacuation centers.

The fire in Tawi-Tawi was not only a local incident but also a national concern. Relief operations were immediately organized, but the scale of the destruction showed that recovery will take a long time. Many families had to stay in evacuation centers, depending on donations of food, clothing, and shelter. The tragedy highlights the vulnerability of coastal communities, where houses are often built close together and made of materials that can easily catch fire. It also shows the need for stronger disaster preparedness and government support for marginalized areas. But beyond the physical destruction, the fire also raises spiritual questions about how we respond to suffering and how we live out our faith in times of crisis.

Source: Inquirer.net. Massive fire razes 1,000 homes in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, leaving thousands displaced and highlighting urgent needs for disaster preparedness and community support.

Gospel Connection

In the Gospel of Matthew 25:40, Jesus said, *"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."* This verse is very relevant to the situation in Tawi-Tawi. The families who lost their homes are among "the least of these" who need our help. When we give food, clothing, or shelter to them, we are not only helping people but also serving Christ Himself. The Gospel teaches us that compassion is not optional; it is a requirement of faith. In Filipino culture, we have the value of malasakit, which means genuine concern for others. Malasakit is the Filipino way of living out the Gospel's call to compassion. When we show malasakit to the victims of the fire, we are practicing the very heart of Christianity.

Malasakit and Bayanihan

Even though the fire brought destruction, it also showed the resilience of the Filipino spirit. Communities came together to help the victims. Neighbors shared food, local organizations sent relief goods, and volunteers offered their time and energy. This bayanihan spirit reflects the Gospel's assurance that light can shine even in the darkest times. In Matthew 5:4, Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* Comfort comes not only from faith but also from the solidarity of people who choose to care. The victims of the fire may have lost their homes, but they did not lose hope because others stood by them. This shows that even in tragedy, there is still goodness and love that can rise from the ashes.

The Tawi-Tawi fire also teaches us important lessons for the future. First, we need to strengthen disaster preparedness, especially in vulnerable communities. Second, we must continue to practice bayanihan and malasakit, not only during disasters but also in everyday life. Third, we should remember that material possessions can be lost in an instant, but faith,

compassion, and unity are treasures that cannot be destroyed. The Gospel reminds us not to store treasures on earth but to store treasures in heaven, where they will last forever. Helping others and living with love are treasures that no fire can ever take away.

Hope Rising from the Ashes

The fire in Tawi-Tawi was a painful reminder of how fragile life can be. Yet, it also became an opportunity to live out the Gospel's call to compassion and solidarity. In the face of destruction, Filipinos responded with bayanihan, showing that even in ashes, hope can rise. The Gospel correspondence to this news is clear: we are called to extend help, share our blessings, and bring comfort to those who suffer. As a nation, we must continue to live with integrity, serve with compassion, and let our light shine for the good of all. In this way, tragedy can be transformed into a testimony of faith, love, and unity.

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Chapter IV: Vocation and Multiplication of Grace

The DATE-WITH-THE-LORD Search-In Seminar

As a seminarian, I looked at the DATE-WITH-THE-LORD Search-In Seminar (February 14-15, 2026) with a sense of gratitude and hope. When the participants arrived at Saint Paul Seminary Foundation, I remembered my own first days of discernment—the mixture of excitement, nervousness, and openness to God's call. Seeing Fr. Norman Melchor Peña, SSP, welcome them warmly reminded me of how important it is to feel embraced by the Church at the beginning of the journey. Fr. Leopoldo Leo Vizcarra Botavara III, SSP, encouraged them to make the most of their stay, and I thought back to how those words had once been spoken to me, urging me to take every opportunity to grow.

Fr. Vinz Aurellano, SSP, invited the participants to rest in the Lord, and I realized how true that was in my own formation. Seminary life had been full of study, prayer, and community, but at its heart was always the invitation to rest in God's presence. Discernment was not only about activity or achievement; it was also about silence, listening, and allowing the Lord to multiply the small offerings I brought.

2026 Search-In participants at Saint Paul Seminary last February 14-15 with Rev. Fr. Samy Torrefranca, SSP.

Gospel Connection

Reflecting on the Gospel of February 14, 2026 (Mark 8:1–10), I saw a parallel between the crowd that followed Jesus for three days and these young people who came to the seminary. They arrived hungry—not for bread, but for meaning and clarity. Jesus did not send the crowd away; instead, He fed them with compassion and abundance. In the same way, the seminary became a place where God nourished the hunger of the youth with prayer, fraternity, and guidance.

Seeds of Vocation

I remembered how vocation began for me with small steps. The disciples offered seven loaves, and Jesus multiplied them. I had offered my own time, openness, and willingness, and God transformed that into a deeper calling. Watching the participants, I saw in them the seeds of future priests and religious who might one day serve the Church in the Pauline way. Their presence reminded me that God continued to call, and that the Church was renewed by the generosity of the young.

Faithfulness to the Call

The Search-In Seminar was more than just an event; it was a living parable of the Gospel. Compassion fed, stewardship multiplied, and vocation transformed. As I continued my own journey, I prayed that those participants would discover the joy of serving the Lord through a life of love and service to His Church. And I prayed that I would remain faithful to the call that had brought me here, offering my own "loaves" so that Christ could multiply them for the good of His people.

Chapter V: The Way Back Home: Why Love Never Tires of Waiting

Every journey back to where we belong begins not with perfection, but with the courage to return — and in that return, we discover that love, mercy, and grace have been waiting all along.

> *"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*

This image illustrates the parable of the Prodigal Son from the Gospel according to St. Luke.

The First Breath of Return

Sometimes the hardest part of coming back is the *very first breath* you take upon arrival. It feels like releasing an *exhale* you've been holding for a *lifetime*. After years of *running away* and *struggling to survive* on your own, you finally stop. You stand there — *tired and broken* — realizing that the *road back* was never as long as the *fear* that kept you away.

The Clothes We Choose to Wear

We often think our *mistakes* are like *clothes* we can never take off. When we fail — whether by *losing a job*, *breaking a relationship*, or simply *losing our way* — we begin to wear our *failures* like *dirty rags*. *Shame* becomes our *identity*. We walk with our *heads down*, rehearsing *apologies*, convinced we no longer deserve to be called *"child"* or *"friend."* We settle for being *strangers* because we feel too *stained* to belong.

The Love That Watches the Horizon

But the most beautiful thing about *real love* is that it doesn't wait for *perfection* before reaching out. It doesn't stand at a *distance*, *arms crossed*, demanding *explanations*. It doesn't point *fingers* at your *mess*. Instead, it shines like a *light left on all night*. *True grace* is *scandalous* — it runs toward the one who feels *least deserving*. It doesn't ask, *"What did you do?"* It simply says, *"I'm glad you're here."*

The Fields That Stayed Green

We often fear that while we were gone, the *world* we left behind has *moved on* or *withered away*. We expect to return to *barren fields* and *locked doors*. Yet *mercy* works differently. The *"home"* we left never stopped *growing* just because we *wandered*. The *peace* we thought we *destroyed* often remains, waiting for us to *reclaim* it. The *path back* is never as *ruined* as we imagined.

Why We Keep Trying

In a *world* quick to *judge* and eager to *cancel*, the chance for a *fresh start* feels *miraculous*. At some point, we are all *weary travelers* dressed in *rags* of our own making. But if we find the *courage* to turn around and take even *one step back*, we discover something *life-changing*: we are not defined by the *"far country"* where we got *lost*. We are defined by the *arms* that *hold us* when we *return*. We are *home* — not because of what we've *done*, but because of who we have *always been*.

In the end, home is not a place we earn — it is the embrace that has been waiting for us all along.

6

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